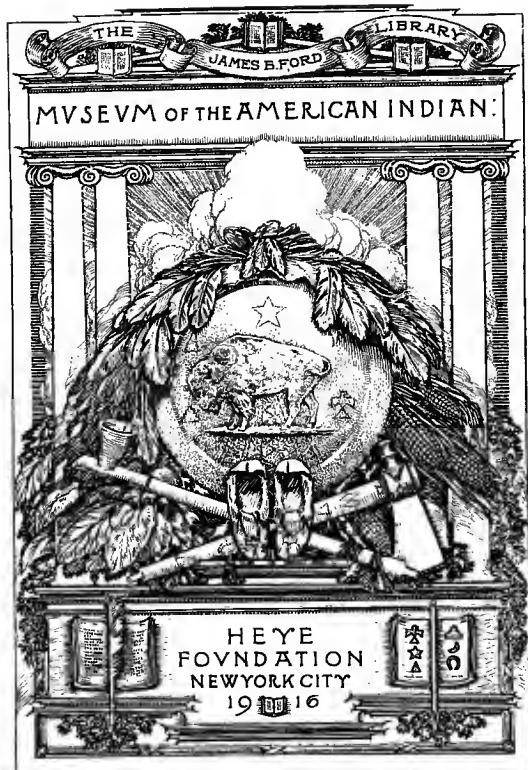


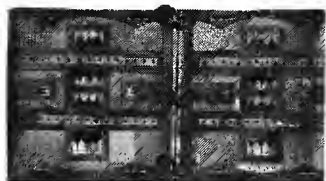
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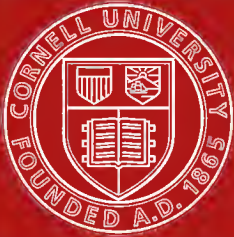
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Certain Clay Figures of Teotihuacan.

By H. NEWELL WARDLE.

Certain Clay Figures of Teotihuacan.

BY

H. NEWELL WARDLE.

My object, in presenting this brief paper, is not to herald the discovery of any new type of Mexican antiquity, but to correlate certain recorded customs with a definite class of well-known objects. In the course of my work upon the Mexican collections of the Academy of Natural Science of Philadelphia, my attention was drawn to an almost perfect, joined figure from San Juan Teotihuacan (Fig. 1). The type is a familiar one in collections from that locality, and this particular specimen differs only from its congeners by the presence of the hinged legs and the fact that the arms—now broken away—were originally one solid piece with the body.¹ That these torsos when headless, are not always recognized as such, is proven by the amusing fact that two of those, which came to us from a private collection, through a prominent museum, were mounted horizontally, after the manner of animal heads, the breast being mistaken for the eye, the lower perforation for the nostril² (Figs. 2 and 3).

Some years ago, in her memorable paper upon the "Terra-Cotta Heads of San Juan Teotihuacan,"³ Mrs. Nuttall propounded the theory that the perforations through these bodies were intended for the passage of cords in simulation of the lashing of the mummy-bundle. That the piercing of these anything but "mummy-shaped objects" was ever destined for a purpose other than the attachment of the separate legs and arms—each with a single hole through its beveled upper extremity—is extremely doubtful. The character of the limbs, and the manner of their hinging to the trunk, would seriously interfere with the construction of a mummy. Moreover, had such been the destination of the clay figurines in question, it would have been infinitely more practical

¹ The American Museum of Natural History possesses five such figures one only showing a head, and all doubly pierced for the attachment of legs and arms.

² Fig. 5, which is actually an animal head, is shown for comparison.

³ "American Journal of Archaeology," Vol. II.

to model the bunched corpse in a single piece. That the limbs were thus loosely attacked, would indicate that motion, not rigidity, life, and not death, was the idea expressed by the native artist.

We know from the record of Diego Duran,—whom Mrs. Nuttall also quotes—that, on the first day of the third month—Tozotzontli—"from tree to tree, across their cultivated fields, they hang sundry cords and from these suspend here and there, little idols or rags, in fine anything, so that those who do not know and understand it, believe that they are scarecrows, or children's play-things, while in reality it is but superstition and abuse."¹

Duran's statement is further confirmed by the fragmentary hymn devoted to this day, which has been published by Dr. Seler from the Nahuatl text of Sahagun.² But, "the little stones, the wee wooden things" of the Nahuatl text is not to be construed as excluding objects of other material—clay, cotton, etc.

When it is remembered that this festival day of the ancient Mexicans was intimately connected with the seed-time of the year, and presided over by the goddess—or god—Cinteotl; that this youthful divinity was the personification of the growing plant, it follows naturally, though not necessarily, that the figurines placed, during the festival of the "watch" above the planted milpas should be the representation of the guardian deity of the maize, Cinteotl. A distinctive feature of her costume at this time, is the red paint upon her face and portions of her body, which Dr. Seler believes to refer to the red tips to the young maize shoots.³ The very decided traces of red paint still visible upon the jointed figure in the Academy's collection (Fig. 1), may be construed as evidence that this terra-cotta was the representation of the goddess, though the peculiar association of the color, red, with the rites of the dead renders the evidence inconclusive."⁴

The heads which pertain to this type of figure, usually lack ornamentation, their maker having depended upon perishable material for the realistic presentation of his concept, but occasionally a series of wavy ridges span the broad head (Fig. 1), or the roll upon the forehead, intended for the fixation of the head-dress, seems to end off in a serpent's uplifted head (Fig. 6), which may

¹ "Historia de los Indias de Nueva Espana," Vol. II, p. 274.

² "Verhandlungen der Königl. Kaiserl. Museum für Völkerkunde," Berlin, Vol. p.

³ Op. cit., p.

⁴ The mortuary red has, of course, a very different origin, but this dual symbolism, and the intimate association of life and death pervade the whole breadth of Aztec thought.

or may not be a reference to that other aspect of this goddess—Chicome Coatl.

It must be admitted that there is a lack of visible means of suspension, if the perforations above mentioned be excluded, but such suspension may have been affected through the medium of the scant clothing.

A second type of these jointed figures (Fig. 7) show a tiny perforation through one side of the head, and the remains of a second upon the opposite edge, which could have served no other purpose than that of suspension. The body is entire, and exhibits four piercings, which, instead of running the entire breadth of the trunk, pass through each shoulder and hip from the anterior to the posterior surface. I have never seen the limbs which completed this figurine, but, from analogy, it must be assumed that they existed. There is no sign of paint, but the ware is hard-baked brick-like red clay.

Little can be said of the third class of these so-called *idolettes* with separate limbs. The one in the Poinsett collection (Fig. 8) is of common light clay, showing no evidence of paint. The head, like that of the second type, has the natural rounded outline. In the manner of perforation, this body forms the connecting link between the other types, a single hole being pierced laterally for the connection of the arms, while two are required for the attachment of the legs. It differs from both the preceding types, however, in the possession of clothing other than a necklace. The dress, or *cuetl*, which is here represented, shows that form of ornamentation so common upon certain other figurines of Nahuatlán, which may be simply coarse weaving, but is usually assumed to represent intertwined serpents—a characteristic more typical of Coatlicue.

I cannot close this paper without reference to the other figure believed by Mrs. Nuttall to represent a mummy, and described by her as "a seated figure," the complete representation of a corpse."¹ If I may be permitted to differ again from so justly eminent a mexicanist, I would point out that the figure is not seated, that there is no indication of the *icpalli*, or low seat, mentioned by the Anonymous Conqueror in his description of burial customs;² and

¹ Loc. cit., p.

² "The Relation of a Gentleman who Attended Hernando Cortes," last page.

that, were it present, the legs could not assume the position here modeled.

There is, in the Lamborn collection of the Academy, a duplicate of that one in Mrs. Nuttall's possession. The little individual, with drawn-up knees, lying on a flat background, surrounded by a raised frame, which is highest above the head, has, in this instance, the hands tied flatly at each side by a broad band (Fig. 9). The proportions of the body, the attitude, the manner of tying, the whole ensemble, are decidedly suggestive not of the close, but of the dawn of life, and the frame is a cradle, not a grave. What the use of such tablets was, I do not venture to conjecture, but that this was suspended from some object, animate or otherwise, is proven by the holes on each side of the neck, for the passage of a slender cord.

To sum up—the jointed clay images from Teotihuacan are not foundations for mummy-bundles, but probably representatives of the goddess, Cinteotl, such as were hung across the fields, to watch over the young seed and aid its growth. The countless multiplication of the goddess would have presented no insuperable difficulty to the ancient Mexican, but, were it otherwise, the concept lay not far removed, of a special guardianship over the family fields, by such virgin relatives as had passed before.

That the representatives might maintain the appearance of eternal youth and abounding life, characteristic of this deity, that they might be ever on the watch at so critical a time, this means of imparting motion to them was there adopted. That, with arms and legs rattling in the breeze, they served incidentally as scarecrows, is quite typical of native American thought, which ever seeks to shroud the practical end within the folds of myth and ancient custom.

